

A WORD AND SPIRIT
MAINSTREAM
NETWORK

Magazine Issue 62. MAY 1998
Issue Theme: RENEWING RENEWAL



Introduction

Letter to the Churches

Renewing Associating

Trans-local leadership

Five Core Values for a Gospel People

What has it all been for?

Women in Renewal

Mainstream News

Douglas McBain

Nigel Wright

Michael Bochenski

Paul Beasley-Murray

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Introduction

I am again full of hope for our Union in the twenty first century. After two decades of decline the tide has finally turned. Our churches have begun to cluster and relate in ways not seen for decades. Regional Teams have successfully got alongside local ministers and churches in ways rarely experienced before and have won their confidence. One clear indicator of this is Home Mission - now hitting its target and more year after year. The Union's Ministers themselves soon realised that something deeply significant had been happening. In-service training courses filled rapidly. The Union's new appraisal system reached 87% in take-up, strengthened by supportive friendships with Regional Ministers all over Britain. There is also a new confidence and poise in the Union's leadership with National and Regional Ministers working so well together. A healthy accountability to and inter-relationship with the Union's main leadership body - a smaller but pro-active Baptist Union Council - has also emerged. Settlements are now best described as expressions in partnership - with churches and ministers not only empowered but also fully owning the new processes.



Partnership also can be found in a deepening Baptist commitment to mission locally, nationally and internationally. Increasingly The Union and The Baptist Missionary Society are as one as they work together in the interests of holistic mission. One result is that the media regionally and nationally are beginning to listen to the Free Church voice again for the first time in years. Creative new partnerships among the Free Churches within Churches Together in England, have led to increased credibility in our social, religious and political pronouncements. Even the Baptist Times, for many years both a symptom and a casualty of the Union's failures, began to grow in circulation again as the 10,000 mark - and climbing - was reached again. Community action groups have been springing up all over Britain with Baptists leaving their comfortable ghettos behind to be at the forefront of these initiatives. A breakthrough against commitment-phobia was also achieved at last in 2003. For the first time in many years both baptism and church membership figures are up. The inclusion of members of the congregation in the new style BU Directory also gives a far healthier and accurate picture of the strengths of Baptist life in the first decade of the new millennium. The source of this remarkable turn around? This can be traced to the Baptist Union Council of March 1998 when three reports, *Relating and Resourcing*, *Transforming Superintendency* and *Five Core Values for a Gospel People* were debated and welcomed at the Swanwick Spring Council and subsequently by the constituency.

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Introduction



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I am again full of anxiety for our Union in the twenty first century. After two decades of decline the tide is finally coming in. With a few noble exceptions, our churches have failed to cluster and relate together in hoped for ways. Regional Teams have successfully got alongside local ministers and churches in a few places but elsewhere have collapsed under the weights of financial burdens and apathy. One clear indicator of this is Home Mission with squabbles for ever decreasing funds hitting everyone. The Union's Ministers themselves have preferred not to be challenged too greatly and so have forced acceptance of a diluted version of the Union's new appraisal system. Few have, in practice, taken this up. Plans for new forms of leadership with National and Regional Ministers working together sadly fell victim to the twin demons of suspicion and mistrust.

The Baptist Union Council struggles to hold our Union together but is not helped by having been undermined through some unwise decisions a few years earlier. Relationships between the Union and The Society amount to little more than co-existence now. The media locally and nationally are interested only in the occasional scandal. The perception of Baptists remains that of a small and insignificant sect best avoided. Even the Baptist Times is no more. The attempt to go glossy went the way of other similar A4 Christian magazines and, in the process, the core readership was also lost. On the whole Baptist churches have preferred to manage decline by hiding in ghettos, complaining about 'them' in The Union and developing some of the finest nostalgia habits to be found anywhere in the world. Even Baptist nostalgia is not what it used to be however! It all feels like The Titanic facing that immanent iceberg again..... The source of this depressing state of affairs? This can be traced to the opposition and apathy which met three key Baptist Union reports, *Relating and Resourcing*, *Transforming Superintendency* and *Five Core Values for a Gospel People* over the period of 1998-9.

Well which is it to be?

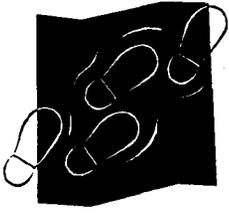
You decide. We all decide.

Please God these articles will help our own choices towards good in the plans and purposes of God.....

Michael I Bochenski

St Albans

Easter 1998



In Step with the Spirit

An advantage that comes with growing older is that whilst many lessons have still to be properly understood, one can hope that some at least have been learned a little, if only partially. With this in mind, I recall an earlier time in ministry when like most aspiring preachers I was wrestling with the question of whether we were in the right place for our ministry, or whether we had been there quite long enough, and now it was time to move on. Location and timing are often to the forefront of a Pastor's thinking, especially on bleak Monday mornings after a weekend that has been rather like the weather – grim damp, cold and cloudy. It was at this point that the letter duly arrived. I had shared my questions with a respected colleague. We were both in the infant class in the early stages of the Renewal in the early 1960's. "Go to 53 Laburnham Crescent, Southwest Scotland, and all will be revealed," was his considered advice. The Spirit of God had clearly indicated this to him and he was kindly passing on the word to me. I should call at this address to find out more.

I had good reasons to weigh this word carefully. My friend was exercising a powerful ministry. His influence was spreading far and wide. He was a gifted pastor and preacher and I appreciated his ministry whenever I had the chance to receive it. Nevertheless, I soon rejected the proposition and decided that this was not the word of the Spirit of God for me. Southwest Scotland is a huge and ill-defined area. If this were the right thing to do it would take an enormous amount of time that I could ill afford to spend in visits to countless libraries and council offices to attempt to find such an address in the first place. What was I to do if there happened to be three - in my idea of the geographical districts? What if my definitions were just out a fraction? I could not see that the Spirit of God would inspire wild-goose chases in any case. So, no. I was not receiving the message simply because it was strange. If God wanted me to move on, He would need to do so in a more convincing way than this. So I put the episode behind me although, in fact, one consequence to this was that my ministerial wanderlust was cured for a period. I settled down to the work, which was to hand. For this I have always remained grateful to my ministerial confidante. Although his word was duff, these results were quite healthy.

Looking back on that incident then set in train a point that I hope to teach as clearly as I can during these coming months as we consider our life together

in the Spirit. If we are to keep in step with Him, we do need to discriminate carefully. This requires the normal processes of rational thought. The indwelling of the Spirit of God also inspires the greatest human qualities of which we are capable, faith, hope, and love. His Gifts always complement these qualities. Wherever else they come from, fanaticism, desperation, and credulity do not come from Him. Their source is more likely to be psychic rather than spiritual. The history of recent years teaches at least one lesson for Pastors and church leaders. We need all the Spirit's fruits and many of His gifts. If we are called to give wise counsel to others from time to time, we also need that most neglected gift – of discernment.

There is much more to add if we are to keep in step. Take the issues raised by the ever-increasing army of trained and gifted Christian counsellors. I know and appreciate the ministry of many with whom I have associated especially in recent years. I see that they fulfil a vital role in today's increasingly frenetic world. I suspect that every church and every Pastor has occasions when they need to call on their expertise either for themselves or for members of their flock. Our Ministry Department has set up a scheme in co-operation with other denominations through which expert help is always available to those who need it, without this being disclosed to any other Minister, including the Superintendent. These are all positive developments that I applaud. These good developments arise at least in part from legitimate renewal teaching over recent years.

Yet, I do not think I am alone in observing that there are some less healthy themes that creep in under their cover. They are to do with the search for personal wholeness through a better understanding of our inner selves, greater levels of self-fulfilment, and higher appreciation of our self-worth. No doubt all of this has its proper place for all of us. But the issues they raise must at least be questioned. Did Jesus call us to a life of self-absorption, or to something else? Is it really the function of the Omni-present Holy Spirit to hide Himself in the first part of our public worship services? When His presence is invoked out from His hiding place at the end of the Word for Ministry time, does He really want to spend His energies sorting out the emotional complexities of the troubled lives of those who are seeking His help? If that is what it's all about – in other words - where does the word-discipleship fit into this scheme of things?

Christine and I have just returned from a thrilling ministry visit to a part of the world we have never seen before. It was arranged by the BMS, to Nepal, where every one of our own people is a heroine or a hero. What a privilege

to share their lives for a few brief weeks. We shared their homes, their food, their prayers, a tiny corner of their work, and vast quantities of their patience and their love. Many of the scenes we saw were unforgettable. We shared worship with expatriates like ourselves and also with Nepali Christians. We heard the stories of the great things God is doing in this poor land with such vast needs, and such dedicated workers.

One story is to do with the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit in what seems to be a well-authenticated revival movement. It began with a miracle of spontaneous healing for a simple pagan lady who was ill. She had gone to various healers and shamans without any improvement to her condition. Then, as it were by chance, she met a Christian believer who prayed for her in the Name of Jesus. The result was immediate and she was totally healed. She returned to her village in the foothills of the Himalayas and her friends asked her how the healing had occurred. She responded that it was through the prayer that was offered in the name of Jesus, but she was not able to enlighten her friends with any other information about Him, because she had never heard his story. Since prayer to Jesus had worked for her, it was not long before others too sought His help, though none of them had read, seen, or listened to any teaching about the Saviour who heals. Soon there were a number of notable healings among these simple people and so they wanted to know more of Jesus and the secret of His power. It was at this point that they came across some Christians who were able to fill in the considerable blanks in the story about Christ that they had now grasped. The result – a significant people movement and many conversions. The result- many more have turned to Christ. The consequence, these new converts, full of the love of Christ, hungry for the word of Christ, and deeply imbued with His power through the Holy Spirit, have been expelled from their homes and have forced to resettle elsewhere in the land.

My conviction is that where the Spirit of God moves with great power, then those who experience this are moved to make great sacrifices for Christ they see that we are not called to a life in which we please ourselves. We are called to a life of service for Him. This too will be a theme I will want to preach around the land. If one consequence is that we are challenged to abandon all self absorbing pursuits in order to follow our Lord more wholeheartedly, then I will be satisfied with that. If I can encourage every young Minister to seek the opportunity of service at least for a period of months in the developing world, even if their call is to serve in our affluent land, then I will be pleased. If I can stimulate some of our best-qualified candidates, who have healthy bodies, sound temperaments, and who can work in teams, to apply for such

full time service, I will have accomplished my goal. To be in step with the Spirit requires no less than this.

Yet its not just a matter of applying a few correctives here and there with the challenge to greater commitment to the task. There is more to it than this, even when we add the priceless ministry of encouragement to all that it means to keep in step with the Spirit. We must acknowledge that the process of renewal is the work for the Spirit to do not us, much as we may urge one another to do our best for God. Indeed every aspect of the work of the Spirit is the work of God, not the work of man. Everything that we have seen so far has only been a partial revelation His mighty arm. We have yet to see a great moving of the Spirit in the western world in our lifetime. So to keep in step with the Spirit must mean to plead for more than we have yet witnessed of all that Scripture promises about Him. Those who grew up in an alliterative era will appreciate the point. It's nothing less than the dynamic of the Spirit that we must seek today.

Can we seriously entertain such a hope for the British church today? Here in the complacent west, in our ancient land, with our still diminishing church statistics, can we have such positive ambitions for a unique new move of God in our midst? If we can we pursue such a goal for our own church, is there any chance some of the benefits spilling over into the wider church represented by all the other Christian denominations with which we associate? Could this beneficial spin-off include our loose and fragile Union structures that our respected and loved leader David Coffey and his staff, and his colleagues nation-wide have been spending time and energy on recently. The purpose of this attempt is to make our Union together to be the best that it could be for God for the work of the new millennium.

It is my conviction that if God moves in a fresh way in our midst at this time, then every part of the Body of Christ will benefit, including those we call our own. And I know that this will only be proved by the fulfilment of the event – which only He can do. Is there anything left for us to tackle at this point or do we retreat into the world of pious impotence? I think not. For the lesson that emerges from the textbook for the Church in step with the Spirit is that there were two important acts for them before the Spirit moved just as there are for us. The first was that they were called to much prayer together. (Acts 1.14) They gave themselves to this in great unity. They were of one mind about the significance of what they were doing, and nothing held them back from it. We cannot induce the actions of a Sovereign God. Our human efforts are moribund and those who attempt to take over what God alone can do are

soon revealed as spiritual bankrupts. But we can pray. Pray for your own ministry and church. Pray for your family and your children. Pray for your town. Pray for all the other churches besides your own. Who knows - God may prefer to bless them rather than you and if you have not even prayed for them how bereft their blessing will leave you! And pray for the under-prayed and overworked body of which you are a part – The Baptist Union and all its officers including me! I really need that. I can tell when I am supported in this way, and also when I am not. Without God, we will not be blessed. With Him, all things are possible.

The second was that they got ready for mission. That is the point about the appointment of Matthias to take the place of Judas. (Acts 1.23-6) It was in the expectation of a fulfilment of the promises of God that would far exceed their present understanding. The record that then follows strongly endorses the confidence they had clearly displayed. It can be the same for us too.

So this year lets get in step together, then keep in step together – with the Spirit. Not a bad way to prepare for the millennium to come!

Douglas McBain is the President of The Baptist Union of Great Britain 1998-9.

Time to Associate

Readers of Mainstream will be aware that the top issue to emerge from the Denominational Consultation was the renewal of our patterns of associating, that is to say, the ways in which as churches we relate to each other within the framework of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and to other churches beyond that framework.

Readers will also be aware that this has been a concern of Mainstream for some time and that this concern is reflected both in the strap-line 'Mainstream: A Word and Spirit Network' and in the active steps Mainstream has taken to promote networks. For some time now the encouragement given in these pages and from Mainstream platforms has been to build supportive and mutually beneficial relationships between pastors and churches. This is held to be a reflection of God's own being as communion and to take us a step closer to that strong relational coalition which is implied in the word 'associating'.



By the time this article is published all pastors and churches of the associations in membership with the Baptist Union will have been sent a copy of the report *Relating and Resourcing* along with a covering letter outlining the Baptist Union Council's initial, and largely very favourable, response to it. It is not the purpose of this article to regurgitate what can be read in fuller detail in the report but rather to encourage readers to make the best use of what is already in their hands.

On many occasions this report has been described as 'pivotal'. It has been broadly recognised that it is the hinge upon which the entire dynamic stemming from the Denominational Consultation is likely to turn. Other reports have been stacking up like aircraft entering a busy airport, delayed for the time being until *Relating and Resourcing* has landed. If the report really is so crucial, and I certainly believe this to be the case, then it needs both the attention and the active advocacy of as many people as possible. The broad support, albeit expressed in non-binding 'straw polls', of the Baptist Union Council is a good beginning, but it is only a beginning and there are numerous further hurdles to be crossed. This Union has it within its grasp to reform itself and enter into the next millennium with God's help as a substantially renewed body. This will only come to pass however if a powerful movement for constructive change is encouraged on its way by a multitude of voices.

The report is based upon the belief that Baptist churches should be 'independent with regard to power but not in regard to communion'. In other words, it strongly reaffirms the basic conviction expressed in the Baptist Union's Declaration of Principle that all churches should have liberty to interpret the mind of Christ for themselves. But this does not mean that we should practise independency in regard to fellowship and mutual co-operation. Indeed, precisely because we have renounced the use of power over each other we need to pay all the more attention to the quality of our freely given relating. At this point we have a great deal to learn. We need to rediscover how to relate to one another in effective fellowship and productive mission. For this reason the first two of the seven recommendations of the report are to do with recognising that *when it comes to associating together we are falling a long way short and need to take active steps to redeem the situation*. This will only happen as a large number of initiatives are taken at the grassroots level by individuals and by churches to build relationships and friendships with others.

I confidently predict that these first two recommendations are likely to get lost in the reactions and responses to the rest of the report, which goes on to deal with the nuts and bolts reform of associations, with their reshaping into a

smaller number of regional associations, with the formation of leadership teams, with the radical revision of the BU Council, with the shaping of a millennium covenant and with the setting up of an implementation group to see the agreed changes of this and other reports into being. These later recommendations address existing institutional reality and so give people some obvious things to chew on. The first two recommendations are calling, however, for a new, organic, relational reality and a new spirit between the churches. To accomplish this is much more difficult and much more personally costly. Yet without this, the other reforms risk re-arranging what we already have without bringing about the depth of renewal which is really needed.

What then should readers do with the report? Here I dare to make a few suggestions:

- Copy it, if you are able, and disseminate it amongst elders, deacons and church members. People need to become familiar with its contents and to have time to reflect upon its challenges. Many will follow it only in part because they have not been party to the thinking which has led up to it. But at the very least it will help them grasp some of the issues we face.
- Read it. Do so several times in order to absorb what it says and what it does not say. The report sets out a set of broad principles, a framework for the future. But it also avoids inserting premature details in the belief that these must be discovered by us all corporately and together.
- Follow it, especially where it calls for initiatives to be taken at the local level to build clusters and networks of churches. Associating is not primarily about local churches relating to a central body, whether associations or Union. It is about local churches relating in the service of each other and of our common mission. How you and your church should relate needs to be prayed about, thought about and acted on. Nobody else can determine this for you. At this point the onus is not upon the BU Council but upon you and me in our particular settings. All of us have responsibility for relating constructively to other churches of whatever denomination. For some ecumenical associating will be the primary way in which they seek to express their wider communion. For others those primary relationships will be found with other Baptist congregations. Whichever is the right road for you, it is correct to interpret this report as giving 'permission' and support for experiment without this feeling as if it is disloyalty.
- Advocate it. The report is both radical and realistic. It is radical in that if adopted it would involve a widespread recasting of denominational life. The recommended reforms are intended to simplify the structures of the Union, to

make them more effective as resource agencies, to focus our use of time, finance and persons on the things that most matter. It is realistic in that it is legally and organisationally well within the bounds of possibility. However, it will not happen unless there is a will to make it happen. This is where advocacy comes in. Advocacy involves speaking up for it in whatever councils you might be involved, whether it be at district, association or Union level.

- Improve it. This report is not above criticism and if criticism is aimed at improving its recommendations then this is to be welcomed. The Task Group on Associating has drawn up a report which now becomes the property of the Council and of the Union. The Union can dispose of it as it wills to do. Of course, to reject it would call into question the credibility of the very process of Consultation in which we are engaged. The only realistic option is to build upon the report, where necessary adding to and improving its recommendations so that we come out of the whole process with the best possible pattern for the future.

I have heard it said that in our life as a denomination we have moved from a position of latent hostility towards the Union to one of latent apathy. Many people have watched the evolving changes among us with interest while at the same time hedging their bets as to which way things will go. The recommendations of *Relating and Resourcing* offer a window of opportunity which could enable us to move from latent apathy to quiet enthusiasm. If we can succeed in building an organically strong network, or network of networks, of churches effectively served by flexible structures and by well qualified and well chosen team of ministers working through regional associations and through the national Baptist Union, then we would have something to sing about. The prospect of being able to confess one's membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain without lapsing into the key of B minor is extremely inviting. *Relating and Resourcing* is indeed pivotal. Amongst other things this means that the opportunity to do what this report could enable us to do is unlikely to come around again in the near future. There is therefore an element of *kairos* about it and we are well advised to seize the opportunity.

Nigel Wright is the Senior Minister of Altrincham Baptist Church, Cheshire and chaired the Associating Task Group that produced 'Relating and Resourcing.'

Serving God after Sunday

A WORD AND SPIRIT
MAINSTREAM
NETWORK

Presents...

LIFE TO THE
MAX

"DRAWING TOGETHER OUR FRAGMENTED LIVES"

Whole life discipleship

The aim of this conference is to challenge Christians to be disciples who will actively take part in God's Mission to the world - Monday to Saturday - equipping churches to prepare their members for this, rather than sucking them into church life and draining them dry. Delegates will be encouraged to look at the church as a refuelling and service station, rather than as a refuge.

CONFERENCE

HAYES CONFERENCE CENTRE, SWANWICK

11th ~ 13th JANUARY 1999

LIFE TO THE MAX

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

• **Joel Edwards** (General Secretary of the Evangelical Alliance) • **Nigel Wright** (Altrincham Baptist Church) • **Mark Stibbe** (St Andrews, Chorley Wood) • **David Coffey** (General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain) • **Phil Wall** (Salvation Army) to be confirmed.
 Worship to be led by Leon Evans of the Zion Network.

BOOKING FORM

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Please detach & return this booking form to:-
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 21b Four Oaks Road, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, B74 2XT.
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Trans-local leadership

It scarcely seems possible that already eighteen months have passed since the General Superintendency Review Group (GSRG) first presented '*Transforming Superintendency*' (TS) to the Baptist Union Council. The product of twenty meetings over two and a half years. This article is a reminder of some of the key concerns and ideas that emerged and which have now flowed into the wider denominational renewal/consultation process. We had two overriding concerns in the GSRG: 1) To decide what form of superintendency our Union now needs to help us fulfil our calling as the people of God. 2) To ensure that the need for mission dominated our thinking and recommendations for the future. All the words that follow in bold print are taken straight from 'TS'. Put simply in future trans-local leadership, we were looking for: *pastoral and spiritual oversightin the context of the mission of God*. Ah but what might *that* mean in practice we asked? Here are some of our ideas.

Support of ministers

'We believe that it is important that the Area Superintendent builds up as close as possible a relationship with the ministers'. This would include a major responsibility for the probationary years. By the end of those two years of reflection, debate, discussion, papers and prayer we had all reached the conclusion that the encouragement, mentoring and pastoral care of ministers in mission was the wisest way forward for trans-local leadership as the C 21st beckoned. Tea and cakes at the Manse were not what we had in mind of course! Rather we came to see local Baptist Ministers as forming our nationwide mission team. They/we are the ones who help to lead our Union's front-line mission units - the local churches. Hence the fundamental recommendation of '*Transforming Superintendency*': **'The fundamental priority of the Superintendent's work must be the support, encouragement and care of ministers'**. Other superintendency tasks must be relegated, we argued, so that this work may be thoroughly done. For example, ecumenical partnerships, grant applications and loan appeals.

We saw an already emerging role for our Baptist Colleges here as well: e.g. in providing in-service training opportunities and Christian education courses. Another way such a clear division of responsibilities might help our Union in the C21st was to prevent the 'angel in the middle' problem! That is of a Super seeking to support both the Minister and a Church in a time of dispute and being torn inside in the process. And so we called for the Association to represent the Church in such cases and the Superintendent the Minister, a pattern operated already - we noted - by the Scottish Baptists. It is neither good nor healthy for one person to be in the centre alone at such times we felt.

'It is our desire' we emphasised' that the Superintendents be as free as possible for major tasks of encouraging and caring for ministers.' Accordingly, we invited our transformed Supers to **'devise programmes for regular and sustained pastoral contact with ministers.'** We spoke of the need for the Supers to e.g. establish in-service training days, convene conferences and to encourage - though not undertake - appropriate appraisal. Also we appealed for them to continue to develop **'pastoral teams for the care and support of ministers'**.

Settlement

Our terms of reference included, of course, a constructive look at the present process of settlement. One of our clear aims, in the suggestions we offered through TS, was to give a deeper sense of personal ownership to ministers and churches in the settlement process. Another was to speed up the process for churches and ministers in practice. Anyone who considered the submissions some of our Group received or who reflected on the questionnaire sent out to all our ministers and churches will recall the feelings of powerlessness among ministers and churches we discovered again and again where the present patterns of settlement are concerned. The sense of twelve men, as it was then, controlling most of the initial processes was something we wanted to end *Instead we argued that the Supers should become 'partners in the settlement process'*. No more and no less than that. Partners with Associations, Ministers, Churches and Colleges in the whole process of a new call to a new pastorate or appointment. We suggested, for example, that the initial settlement visit be shared with an Association representative as well to express this partnership. We proposed that ministers be allowed, without stigma, to take initiatives in approaching churches directly and that the Mission Department nationally be given a greater role in the whole process. For example 'the list' could be updated almost daily on a national web site whose database would be accessible by e-mail. *Information is power.*

We also appealed for the training of independent Moderators and of local churches in the search process and suggested the statutory video (!) and some safeguards here. To strengthen our report we commissioned a 'widespread statistical survey' whose results, we were reliably assured, contained statistically sound data. These confirmed among other things, that there is among us significant unease with the present settlement patterns and that real concerns persist about the depths of our Union's pastoral care and support in practice for our ministers. None of this should be seen as reflecting badly on the present Superintendents we emphasised. Rather we stressed that setting Mission Impossible tasks for the present Superintendents over the 1980s and 90s had, in practice, had its casualties..... The casualties also included a

palpable sense of failure in much Baptist associating, for all the occasional good practice stories.

Renewing Associating

Trans-local leadership in the care and settlement of ministers cannot be seen in isolation from the churches we argued. Linked to all of this, then, was our call for the renewal of our Associations and of meaningful associating among us. **'Any reform of the Superintendency entails the renewal of the Churches, Associations and Colleges'** This we argued would flow from this return to fundamentals, **'going to the roots'**: the care of ministers by Superintendents and the support and encouragement of churches by Associations. In practice of course we argued that both should happen in partnership i.e within Association Teams which always include the Superintendent. **'We see no creative renewal in mission without new experiences of associating'** we argued and pleaded for Associations to be **'bold and imaginative'** in their life. **'Perhaps'** we said **' some forms must die because they no longer forward the mission as once they did. If that is so, let it be!'** In the process we appealed for an important shift in our thinking to take place. **'We recommend that the greater responsibility for the life of the Churches rests with the Associations of which the Superintendent is a part'** In practice, this would mean Associations taking responsibility for e.g. church-planting strategies, ecumenical developments and for care of the churches task groups. Clearly there is considerable overlap with the complementary proposals about Regional Teams to be found in *Relating and Resourcing* here.

Ecclesiology

Throughout our deliberations the significantly different ecclesiology that is ours as Baptists made us think and think again. We are a Union and *not* a Church. We *are* a network of local churches related to each other nationally and regionally as well as locally and often ecumenically as well. *Sometimes* those relationships are strong but often they are, in practice weak. How do we offer leadership/*episcopate* to a Union which has near its heart these words: **'...each church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws?'** In the end the only initiatives that will work are those agreed by local churches and not by the Superintendents or even by Association Teams. We should never forget this. We tried to suggest creative ways forward with a vision of a balanced partnership between national, regional and local expressions of our life together as Baptists.

'We need to ask which factors are best dealt with locally, which regionally and which nationally.' TS argued that the Supers should remain national

leaders though with the actual costs - eg housing and expenses - shared more with the Areas. The purpose of this was and is to: **'To forward the work of the national interest in the Area and the work of the Area in the national.'** We also argued that, in practice, this should mean that the Supers would continue to practice self-restraint in their participation at Baptist Union Council debatesas other staff members are required to do. We also appealed for the establishment of a Mission and Ministry Forum to bring the Supers out into partnership with a broader national leadership team. I personally can see no significant difference here from 'Relating and Resourcing's appeal for a National Leadership Team. I do, though, have one reservation there which I will come to later. It was our conviction that some national funding and dimension to the Superintendency should be preserved. This will, in practice, give a freedom from and independency of the Area that may well be helpful when disputes arise or when things are not going well. The 'sack the football manager' tendency is never far away in Baptist life in practice. Baptists are not always nice people!

Pastoral Care of Superintendents

We argued that this should happen in a partnership of local churches, the General Secretaries, the Board Moderator and the Area Pastoral Committees (APCs). We also argued for new arrangements for sabbaticals and alternative cover which allows appropriately gifted Baptists who are not ex- or serving Superintendents to demonstrate *episcopus*. In this way we hoped to be true to our Baptist understandings of leadership and to share out the work more and ease at least some of the stress levels of a Super caring for two huge areas over, perhaps, several months. We also appealed for a **female Moderator of the Board** to be appointed to help restore the balance of Galatians 3 : 28 at that high level of leadership among us all. This recommendation has been overtaken by events, not least after the exemplary service put in by Chris Norrish in that capacity, *had* to come to an end. I do hope that, longer term, this suggestion will not be forgotten however.

Some key convictions

- **'A congregation living in deliberate neglectful isolation from others where they call on the name of the Lord is no more the Church than a Christian who never seeks fellowship with others is a real disciple'**
- **'Ministers do not belong to isolated congregations but to the Church as a whole'**
- **'We believe that by relating mainly to the Union's Ministers the Superintendency will strengthen the sense of national belonging as well as being partners in encouraging local decision and action'**

- 'We are looking for new forms of life, collaborative patterns of oversight and care, which involve Associations, Superintendents, Churches and ministers'
- 'The Associations must play a more creative role in the mutual pastoral care and encouragement of the churches . This is their responsibility to be exercised as a complement to the work of the Area Superintendent'

And so we submitted our work to the people of God.....

Discussion Points

I conclude this contribution to *Renewing Renewal* with a number of discussion points that I am sure will emerge over the next few months.....

- 1) Care of Ministers or Regional Strategist? *Are Baptist ministers the actual leaders in mission or the Senior Regional Minister according to our Baptist ecclesiology and practice? Can these two insights converge in practice. One of the several straw polls at the March 1998 Baptist Union Council - whilst not binding - revealed overwhelming support for the view of TS that: 'The fundamental priority of the Superintendent's work must be the support, encouragement and care of ministers'. My own view is that, in practice, these two insights can, must and will converge in the Baptist Regional Teams of the C21st.*
- 2) Associations who discover a new identity in meaningfully caring for and supporting our local churches or by encouraging the process of voluntary clustering and networking for mission. *Again these insights need not be incompatible but they do have a very different rationale behind them. One puts its energies into encouraging some of our churches to relate; the other puts its energies into getting alongside churches in their local mission. The real question is in fact this: where will the energies of the new Regional Teams go in practice?*
- 3) Regional Team Leader or Regional Team Member. TS argues that the Superintendent need not necessarily be the Team Leader. R and R argues for the Senior Regional Minister to lead the region. *What if another is a more gifted chairperson or mission strategist for example and a Senior Regional Minister is the better pastor of pastors?*
- 4) Accountability to and appointment by Council or to and by a gathering of regional churches and ministers. *Institutional de-centralisation can lead to national and regional collapse or to national and regional renewal. The eventual decisions on this will affect the future of the Baptist Union of Great Britain enormously. Council must, in the end, after full consultation, decide of course. Whatever the outcomes, it is vital that together we get the overall balance of our Union between its local, regional and national expressions right.*

- 5) The Area Pastoral Committees (APCs) made more accountable to the Union or the abolition of APCs to be replaced by Regional Association Executives. *What will replace the pastoral care of the SRMs that is currently offered to the Supers by such groups? How will we ensure in practice that 'lay' people continue to serve at this high regional leadership level. Revolution or evolution? Abolition or reform. What a key renewal question that is!*
- 6) A Settlement and nomination process done in partnership with others or one mainly administered by the Senior Regional Ministers. *This decision is fundamental to the pattern of episkope among us in the future. A paper on this is due to come before Council later in 1998. Please pray with us that these interrelated issues of trans-local leadership, pastoral care of ministers and of effective associating will converge constructively in this debate too.*
- 7) No recommendation on the numbers of Associations until we see how new trans-local leadership approaches take effect or upto 16 coterminous Regional Associations by January 2001 with a small regional team and a budget of around £66,000 each. I.e. at least 2 full-time workers and ancillary staff. *I support and agree with the move to coterminous Regional Associations and believe that this is the wisest way to help to secure our Union's future but I do still have some questions. For example, which 13 associations will have 'died' by the year 2001 and can the constitutional processes they will need to go through be completed in that time-span? More significantly how do we ensure that we do not end up with a Premier League of some Regions and three or four poor relations in the relegation zone! I write at a time when my team Nottingham Forest will be going up to the Premier League again. Back where we belong!*
- 8) Effective Leadership by the Baptist Union Council or increasingly by a National Leadership Team? *If this RR recommendation is similar to the concept behind the Ministry and Mission Forum of bringing our national and regional leaders into fuller relationship and partnership - yes! If however in practice this leads to the gradual erosion of Council and leadership by an elderate nationally and regionally.....I for one will need quite some convincing.*

Our General Secretaries who have invested so much of themselves into this renewal movement have appealed - helpfully - for *harmony in legitimate diversity* over these issuesand rightly so. It was a delight to be present at the March 1998 Council and to witness a clear desire among almost everyone to find convergence and harmony as we move forward together. It is in that same spirit that I offer these eight discussion points. These debates have the potential not only to renew renewal but to transform our Union for good. Please God.....

Mainstream Readers committed to the renewal of our Union may well find it helpful to re-read and pray through now their copy of 'Transforming Superintendency' and of 'Relating and Resourcing.' These should be read in conjunction with the *Five Core Values for a Gospel People* currently circulating. I believe, with an increasing number of people, that these three reports offer the potential for significant renewal in and through our Union in preparation the twenty first century. The outcome of the discussions and debates at the 1998 Focus Days and the September and November Councils *will* affect our Union for at least a generation. The March 1999 Leaders' Day at Wembley advertised in these pages, may well be far more significant than many of us have as yet begun to realise.

I join with my fellow Officers - how strange it is to write that! - and with Nigel Wright in affirming that this is indeed a *kairos* time for us all. Please God we will all keep in step with the Spirit through it all.....

Michael I Bochenski is the Minister of Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans and Vice-President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

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The Executive are always happy to include new names and groupings here. Please let the Editor know of these ...preferably in writing.

(*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims.

Five Core Values for a Gospel People

Key Statement

Because of the way we understand the biblical message, our Baptist emphasis is on trusting and following Jesus together in Christian discipleship. Our identity as Christian people is determined by the life of Jesus. We believe that this involves living in radical commitment to him. Taking this seriously will challenge all the assumptions and practices of our life together. We are called to follow him, doing as he did and giving ourselves to God's loving purposes in the world. Our core values must therefore flow from and reflect the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ - what he is, what he does, what he desires. These values should determine the nature and purpose of the Church. We exist to bear witness to him in the world, to share in his mission, to make known his faithful and saving love for all creation, and to express his concern for the wholeness and harmony of all that he has made. We follow Jesus not simply as individuals. As Baptist we emphasise the significance of the gathered church. Our understanding of church is not as hierarchy or organisation, but essentially as Community in Christ. Relationships are critical to the working of our salvation; hence the emphasis in this document on the aspects of community life.

Baptists are therefore called to be :

A prophetic community - following Jesus in confronting evil, injustice and hypocrisy challenging human concepts of power, wealth, status and security.

An inclusive community - following Jesus in transcending barriers of gender, language, race, class, age and culture identifying with those who are rejected, deprived and powerless

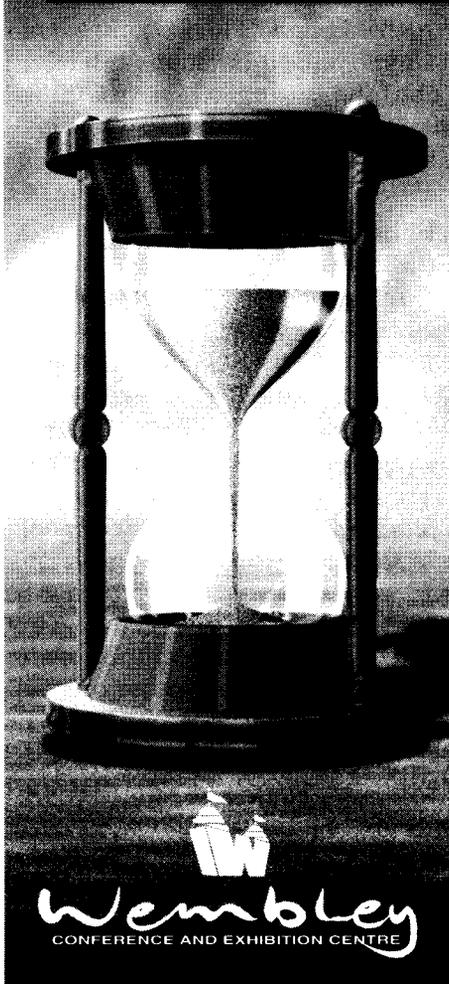
A sacrificial community - following Jesus in accepting vulnerability and the necessity of sacrifice seeking to reflect the generous life-giving nature of God.

A missionary community - following Jesus in demonstrating in word and action God's forgiving and healing love calling and enabling people to experience the love of God for themselves

A worshipping community - following Jesus in engaging in worship and prayer which inspire and undergird all we do and are exploring and expressing what it means to live together as the people of God, obeying his Word and following Christ in the whole of daily life.

Taken from The Report of The Core Values Task Group presented to The Baptist Union Council in March 1998

The next Millennium starts on 13th March 1999...



NATIONAL BAPTIST LEADERS' DAY
WEMBLEY CONFERENCE CENTRE
SATURDAY 13TH MARCH 1999

**SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THE
BAPTIST UNION FOR THE NEXT
MILLENNIUM**

This is the chance for every Baptist church in the UK to be in at the start of something new. Share with us as we prepare for the millennium ahead.

Time: 1400 - 1900, Doors open 1300.

Speaker: David Coffey, General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Food is available at Wembley Conference Centre.

Tickets for this unique event are just £10.00 each, available from 'National Baptist Leaders Day', BUGB, at the Didcot address below. Please make cheques payable to 'The Baptist Union of Great Britain'.

Wembley is easy to get to, with plenty of parking space for cars and coaches, so why not get in touch with other churches in your area and share your travel arrangements.

13th March 1999.
Put it in your diary now, and pass the message on!



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TEL: 01235 512077 FAX: 01235 811537

E-MAIL baptistuniongb@baptist.org.uk WEBSITE <http://www.baptist.org.uk>

RENEWAL - SO WHAT?



The Editor requests an article for the Mainstream magazine on "Renewal within our Baptist family"! My immediate reaction was to feel that I should point Michael Bochenski in the direction of Douglas McBain, who for many years has waved the renewal flag among Baptists. What's more last year Darton, Longman and Todd published his magnum opus: *Fire Over The Waters: Renewal Among Baptists & Others From The 1960s To The 1990s*. But if nonetheless the Editor requests an article from me, then so be it!

One of my difficulties is that I have always had a somewhat ambivalent relationship to renewal - or at least renewal as understood and expounded by charismatics. At no stage have I ever become a card-carrying charismatic, although at one stage I was a member of a charismatic prayer group. Nor during my ministry in Altrincham did I ever become a member of Douglas McBain's Covenant Brothers, even though I attended many of their meetings - for me Douglas was a valued friend, but not my "apostle"!

Yet charismatic renewal has played a significant role in my life and ministry. Initially I was very wary of the claims of charismatic renewal. Although I longed for a deeper experience of God, I just could not buy the theological garbage being peddled in most of the books on the Holy Spirit at the time. Then Tom Smail wrote *Reflected Glory*, and I was won over. Tom captured my mind, and not just my heart. Although not able to accept all of Tom's theological presuppositions, nonetheless I was able to open myself up in a new way to receive a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit upon my life and ministry. Those were heady days. For me worship and fellowship took on new meaning and new depth.

At about the same time Mainstream was born. Douglas McBain in his book tells of how after the Nottingham Baptist Assembly of 1977 he and I got together with Raymond Brown concerned to find a way of reversing the "numerical and spiritual decline" of the Baptist Union. The upshot was a meeting in the September at Gorsley at which "Mainstream - Baptists for Life and Growth" was launched. From the beginning Mainstream was concerned with renewal, but always the kind of renewal which led to (conversion) growth. It is important to note that for the first ten years of its life Mainstream was not distinctively charismatic - rather it was a group which deliberately sought to span the divide between charismatics and non-charismatics. True, much of the worship at the annual conferences was charismatic in style, but our concern was not to promote charismatic renewal, but rather a wide-

ranging renewal of the denomination, which in turn would lead to numerical and spiritual growth..

Thanks in no small measure to the efforts of Mainstream the face of the denomination changed. Many of the members of the Mainstream executive assumed key leadership positions within the denomination, with the result that by the time David Coffey was elected General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1990 the atmosphere in Mainstream circles was euphoric. It was a time of great expectancy. Many of us believed that as a denomination we would now begin to make great advances. Over the past ten or fifteen years the tide had been turning - our hope now was that the tide would come in well and truly.

Alas, if the truth be told, the tide has not come in. At grass-roots level as also in Baptist House the 1990s have by and large been a time of retrenchment. True, exceptions to the rule can be quoted. There are, for instance, churches which have blossomed and grown. And yet the experience of many of us who have been in ministry for a while is that life in the ministry is harder now than when we first began. Indeed, only a few weeks ago a former President of the Baptist Union with a proven evangelistic track record commented to me that he was glad that he was not beginning in the ministry today. True conversion growth is hard to come by.

Yet, renewal has not stood still. For John Wimber with his "Signs and Wonders" was followed by Toronto with its "Blessing", and in some quarters Toronto has been succeeded by Pensacola with apparently yet further blessing. I confess that I have been very much an observer rather than a participant in these latest phenomena, and have tended to adopt the Gamaliel position that time alone will show if God is indeed to be found there. Sadly much of the enthusiasm shown for such movements appears to be more about novelty rather than about renewal. Philip Richter, for instance, perceptively commented: "Many charismatic churches seem to have seized on the Blessing as a means of retaining their customers... One response to market stagnation is to give the customer 'more of the same' or more of what attracted them in the first place, rekindling the original fire" ("*God Is Not A Gentleman*" 20 in *The Toronto Blessing - Or Is It?* edited by SE Porter & PJ Richter, DLT, London 1995).

Where does all this leave us as a Baptist family? Have we as a Baptist family made any meaningful advances in recent years? Renewal has certainly changed our patterns of worship, and yet changes to patterns of worship do not necessarily lead to growth. In 1979 Alan Wilkinson and I discovered from an analysis of 350 Baptist churches "those churches with evangelicals who have a charismatic dimension come out as the most likely to be churches which are growing" (*Turning The Tide: An Assessment of Baptist Church Growth In England*,

Bible Society, London 1980, 36). However, the growth of which we were speaking was fairly minimal. The fact is that renewal, by and large, has not led to effective mission amongst the unchurched, as distinct from "the faith enhancement of the penitent returnees" (see Thomas F. Stransky, WCC Letter On Evangelism X, Geneva, October 1988).

Over the last year or two the Baptist Union appears to have been pre-occupied with structural reforms. However necessary they may be, I fear that such reform may amount to no more than re-arranging the chairs on the Titanic unless our churches face up to the evangelistic challenge which is before us. In this regard I warmly commend *Threshold of the Future: Reforming The Church In the Post-Christian West* (SPCK, London 1988) by Michael Riddell, a Baptist minister from New Zealand. Although I don't agree with all he prescribes, his diagnosis of the current potentially terminal sickness which afflicts our churches is spot-on. Let me quote from his introduction: "The Christian church is dying in the West. This painful fact is the cause of a great deal of avoidance by the Christian community. To use terminology drawn from pastoral care, the terminally sick patient is somewhere between denial and bargaining. Many refuse to contemplate the prospect of death, bolstered by small outbreaks of life, or encouraging one another to falsify diagnosis. Others try to broker a deal with God, whereby if they remain faithful or pray harder or open themselves to a new experience, their small corner of congregational life will be saved"

My fear is that renewal as currently experienced in some of our churches is in fact blinding people to the seriousness of the situation in which we find ourselves. Just as renewal expressed in worship demands new wineskins, so too renewal expressed in evangelism demands new wineskins too. The danger, however, is that we do not change - that instead we spend our time chasing the renewal rather than seeking to reach out to the lost. In this respect some words of William Easum, Director of the Texas-based organisation 21st Century Strategies, are awesomely relevant:

"Congregations whose membership has plateaued or is declining have much in common with dinosaurs. Both have great heritages. Both require enormous amounts of food... Both became endangered species. ... Like the dinosaur they have a voracious appetite. Much of their time, energy, and money is spent foraging for food (for themselves) so that little time is left to feed the unchurched.Either their pride or their nearsightedness keeps them from changing the ways they minister to people... All around are unchurched, hurting people... But many refuse to change their methods and structures to minister to people where they are in ways they

can understand. Like the dinosaur, their necks are too stiff or their eyes too near-sighted. Clearly God doesn't care if these congregations survive; but God passionately cares if they meet the spiritual needs of those God sends their way". (*Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry In A Hostile And Hurting World* Abingdon, Nashville 1993, 14,15)

My prayer as we come to the end of this millennium is that all of us - whether card-carrying charismatics or not - will know the Spirit's courage and the wisdom to face up to the changes which are necessary if we are truly to reaching our lost communities for Christ. Otherwise, like the dinosaurs, we shall eventually die out.

Paul Beasley-Murray is Minister of Victoria Road South Baptist Church, Chelmsford, and Chairman of the Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry.

Where are the women?

We have the same discussion at every Mainstream Leadership Team Meeting, "where are the women who we could ask to speak at the next Mainstream conference?" And our recurrent conversations are a good indication of the situation the church finds itself in at the end of the

second millennium. Renewal has been and continues to be a powerful and transformational influence in the British Christian scene, it has undoubtedly involved many women but as has historically always been the case few are recognised and even fewer have been the women who have shaped the renewal movement in leadership roles. It could be argued that, particularly from a leadership perspective, renewal has been almost exclusively a male story. The point at issue is what is the role of women in the future as we seek to be continually renewed in our renewal? I want to set out my case in this article not for women to seize dominance from men, but for the contribution of women to renewal to be fully harnessed and set in equal partnership with that of men.



The way things were meant to be

There is a strong tendency to let our fallenness define who we are as human beings and consequentially what we are able to do is likewise narrowly limited. We read the biblical text in Genesis concerning the Fall of humanity and mould our understanding of the role of women around the consequences of the Fall.

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
with pain you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

But the Fall was not the last word for humanity; we were not doomed to an estranged relationship with God and between men and women forever, because humanity has the possibility of redemption in Jesus Christ. This provides the opportunity for humanity to enter into relationship with God once again, and it also removes the barriers between the sexes that were the consequence of the Fall. In redemption humanity has a chance to go back to the way things were meant to be... For women and men this means that in Jesus we have the incredible gift of once again being able to reflect the image of God himself in our partnership.

"So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman,
for she was taken out of man." (Genesis 2:23)

And don't we see this reflected in the rest of the Bible? The prophet Joel, in the oft quoted text 2:28-29, longs for a time when the Spirit will be poured out on the Day of the Lord; then issues of age and gender and status would no longer be important. Don't we live in the age of God's Spirit? Don't we follow Jesus Christ who dealt with people as individuals and not according to gender stereotypes? We so easily forget that Jesus saw beyond the household tasks when he urged Mary and Martha to spend time with him. And what about our friend Paul, much maligned and yet a man who was grappling with taking on board the full implications of all that Jesus Christ means and applying it to his contemporary situation? Did he not glimpse the heart of God and how things were meant to be when he wrote,

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,
for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Writers, leaders and speakers seem to spend a lot of time highlighting the disunity between men and women, basing their arguments on rigid gender differences; rather than focusing on their complementarity and partnership. Elaine Storkey develops this point when she writes,

"In rejecting the essentialist and relativist explanations of gender differences, the Christian understanding of creation affirms that the difference between men and women is total, but paradoxically that the difference is indefinable. It claims that the differences can only be understood at all in the context of unity." [1] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza also explores the theme of equality between men and women who follow Christ when she outlines her understanding of Jesus' treatment of women and his inclusion of them in his circle of disciples. This group of followers Fiorenza designates a "discipleship of equals" and a true community. It is still, however, something largely in the future. "The woman-identified man, Jesus, called forth a discipleship of equals that still needs to be discovered and realized by women and men today." [2] The question remains, how can we break out of our cultural mindset that seeks to squeeze us into the mould of gender stereotypes and recapture, in the partnership of men and women, the glorious image of God?

From theory into practice

Achieving a sea change in women's roles within the renewal movement demands a radical change in approach for many existing Christian leaders. Its not positive discrimination, nor forcing women into particular roles that is needed; it is quite simply necessary to value the potential of all people on the basis of gifting not on the basis of gender. Nowhere does the Bible say that certain gifts of the Spirit are limited to a particular gender, rather scripture says

"All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines." (I Corinthians 12:11)

So as leaders we need to be looking at women and men in our congregations and be identifying and developing their God-given gifts, rather than defining people's service by their gender. Then it is gloriously possible for the woman with the gift of leadership to be the minister and the man with the gift of hospitality to be the catering co-ordinator. Releasing gifts in this way opens up amazing new opportunities and helps us to understand the true meaning and effectiveness of the Body of Christ. Adopting this approach, however, means that we have to recognise and step out of our own cultural stereotypes. It means we have to make it our business as leaders to identify the gifts of women and ensure that they have the scope to develop them.

Sadly, when it comes to releasing gifts it is often the women in a congregation who are their own worst enemies. So ingrained are the world's cultural norms, particularly that women should be modest and are of generally little worth, that many women cannot even agree to the fact that they have any gifts whatsoever. A post-Alpha questionnaire asked if participants would like to go on to do a course about discovering their spiritual gifts and one able lady responded "I would if I had any." If renewal is going to mean anything in the coming millennium, that attitude amongst women must be eschewed as tantamount to calling God a liar and refusing to recognise the work of his Holy Spirit. As leaders we must be actively helping women to believe in themselves as children of God and encouraging and releasing their gifts to the glory of God. With a whole world yet to win to Christ we are seriously neglecting our calling as leaders if we are found wanting in this area.

I had a very interesting conversation with a fellow minister recently; we were discussing women in leadership in his church which he assured me were fully recognised. "Oh, so you have women elders then, that's great" I responded, to which he replied "No, women are not able to exercise spiritual leadership and so are not elders." Now I don't say this to score cheap points, because I know that those who hold such views do so genuinely before God, but I fail to see how you can distinguish between leadership within the church and "spiritual leadership" of a church. It all sounds a bit reminiscent of the argument about women being missionaries overseas but not able to preach on furlough and it is about time we sorted out such slippery "double-think" in the interests of the Kingdom. If God's Spirit has bestowed a gift of leadership or preaching or evangelism upon a person, woman or man, that gift of God ought to be recognised and nurtured regardless of gender so that the Church might be built up and edified.

A particular way that all leaders can release the leadership gifts of women and men to the benefit of the whole church is through mentoring. This is a way of getting alongside those who have less developed gifts than ourselves and helping them to mature so far as we are gifted and able. So having identified women who have potential gifts of leadership, and this could be demonstrated within the work, home or church context, we need to be sharing opportunities, wisdom and experience as much as we can. Who are you mentoring? What is your contribution going to be to the emerging generation of leaders in renewal? Win the trust of a woman and a man at least ten years your junior and develop a mentoring relationship; I suggest that it would be mutually beneficial in the long run!

It goes without saying that all this identification of spiritual gifts, encouragement and development, and mentoring holds true at all levels of

renewal - local churches, regional gatherings and nationally, and those of us involved in different spheres of ministry need to be aware of this. So which women are you going to encourage to be deacons and elders in your church, to consider Christian ministry, to lead your regional Word and Spirit Network, to speak at your regional event, to be involved in national events such as Spring Harvest, and so on? And if you have no ideas, why not ask God's Spirit to show you? As leaders we need to be stretching and challenging both men and women to reach their full potential in Christ.

There is of course one point I ought to add to all this and that is that releasing women's gifts into the renewal movement, and particularly in leadership, is probably going to mean that things will be done differently. Most obviously women and men working together in partnership is going to demand more team ministries being developed and this itself will generate new approaches and ways of viewing leadership and mission. But that aside, allowing women to exercise their leadership gifts may require new patterns of working which may also be beneficial to men in leadership. From the perspective of a minister who is also a wife and a mother I have had to think through issues of calling and priorities in my life and this has meant that thus far I have exercised my ministry through a part-time pattern of formal work. But part-time working and even taking six months maternity leave have not diminished my gifts nor caused the downfall of our church; quite the contrary! We need to embrace new models of ministry, for the benefit of all, and learn to strive for God's "impossible" rather than be limited by what the past has said is possible.

The future

At the beginning I stated that the point at issue was the role of women in the future of renewal and I hope it has been clear that, for me, that future involves a partnership of men and women serving God together according to their gifting as opposed to their gender. I believe that this is God's vision for redeemed humanity and is the way we most clearly represent the image of God. In order to bring God's image into sharp focus for a new millennium we as leaders need to be identifying, developing and releasing all the spiritual gifts of women in every way we can; this is our responsibility before God and the long term fruit of our limited ministries. So let's be bold in our mentoring and encouraging, take risks as we stretch emerging leaders, and embrace new ways of doing things - for God's glory. Isn't that what renewal has always been about?

Lynn Green is a Minister at Wokingham Baptist Church , Secretary to Mainstream and the Moderator of the Union's Mission Executive. This article , she emphasises, has been written in partnership with many others.

NB. For a more detailed discussion of this area and in particular the "difficult" passages in the New Testament, read Rosie Nixon's book "Liberating Women for the Gospel", Hodder & Stoughton, 1997

[1] Elaine Storkey, "So What's the Difference?", Third Way, December 1985

[2] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, "In Memory of Her", SCM Press, 1983, p.154

News from The Executive.

Notes after the annual Gorsley Executive Meeting held in March.



The 1998 Conference had been generally very well received and the feedback had been good. The 1999 Conference is already in advanced planning. David Coffey, Joel Edwards, Mark Stibbe, Nigel Wright and Leon Evans are all booked . The 'host' will be Lynn Green. The 2000 Conference is currently being planned.

The Mainstream Vision needs further focusing now. In particular do we concentrate on relationships with leaders only or with whole churches? The Word and Spirit Networks had been a notable breakthrough in some places as well as a catalyst to change in our Union. The Council of Reference concept had worked relatively well and had certainly broadened our leadership team as originally hoped. Broader communication of the Mainstream Vision needs to be worked at. The mentoring of younger leaders is also recognised to be vital to our future.

Michael Bochenski has indicated to The Executive that his five year service as Editor will end with the September 1998 issue. The right new Editor / Executive member is currently being sought to begin work on the January 1999 issue.

Experiments in co-operative evangelism are to be encouraged as the millennium approaches.

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The Council meets next at Sutton Coldfield on Wednesday July 15th 1998

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